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OUR SERVICE FLAG

With April 1 only three days off, Hindenberg finds himself sixty miles from Paris, with the head of his army in the jaws of the British Lion.

Evidence is accumulating that an offensive on the Italian front is now being planned by the Germans. The Austrians are bringing up reinforcements and are evidently counting upon the success of the German drive in France.

The great offensive of the Germans has about petered out. Instead of going to Paris through the British line like a hot knife through a cake of butter, they have retaken a part of the ground they yielded a year ago, an area about the size of Trim county. The British are now firmly standing on their new horseshoe-shaped line waiting for the next move.

Tuesday night British airmen took heavy toll from the German infantry in Bapaume. No official figures are at hand but from a compilation made personally the correspondent is convinced that at least 130 German airplanes have been brought down by the last five days. Bapaume was turned into an inferno by squadrons of British aviators. Their bombs tore to pieces whatever was left of the place. The work of the British airmen since the beginning of the battle has been one of the brightest pages. Bitter battles in the air have been fought by scores of aviators and the service has proved fully its ability to smother the German airmen at a critical time.

After six days of terrific fighting the German offensive in France is beginning to show signs of losing its momentum. The progress of the enemy has materially slackened and the form of the dent made in the allied line west of Cambrai has begun to resemble the familiar wedge-like salient instead of the broad straight forward movement of the offensive which carried all before it. At its apex this wedge has gone beyond Albert to the south of the old allied line as it stood a year ago when von Hindenburg began his "strategic retreat." From this point the line runs off to the northeast at a gentle angle with the line to the south running back until it reaches the Oise river. In spite of tremendous exertions and terrible losses the German efforts to widen the tip of this salient were defeated on Tuesday. The British lines have stood firm to the north and have forced the Germans to turn southward toward the point of least resistance.

"Over the Top"

By An American Soldier Who Went

ARTHUR GUY EMPEY
Machine Gunner Serving in France

(Copyright, 1917, by Arthur Guy Empey)
In the last ten years I have seen times read stories in magazines of cowards changing, in a charge, to heroes. I used to laugh at it. It seemed easy for story-writers, but I said, "Men aren't made that way." But over in France I learned once that the streak of yellow can turn all white. I picked up the story, bit by bit, from the captain of the company, the sentries who guarded the poor fellow, as well as from my own observations. At first I did not realize the whole of his story, but after a week of investigation it stood out as clear in my mind as the mountains of my native West in the spring sunshine. It impressed me so much that I wrote it all down in rest billets on scraps of odd paper. The incidents are, as I say, every bit true; the feelings of the man are true—I know from all I underwent in the fighting over in France.

We will call him Albert Lloyd. That wasn't his name, but it will do.

Albert Lloyd was what the world terms a coward.

In London they called him a shaver. His country had been at war nearly eighteen months, and still he was not in khaki.

He had no good reason for not enlisting, being alone in the world, having been educated in an orphan asylum, and there being no one dependent upon him for support. He had no good position to lose, and there was no sweetheart to tell him with her lips to go, while her eyes pleaded for him to stay.

Every time he saw a recruiting sergeant he'd sink around the corner out of sight, with a terrible fear gnawing at his heart. When passing the big recruiting posters, and on his way to business and back he passed many, he would pull down his cap and look the other way from that awful finger pointing at him, under the caption, "Your King and Country Need You!" or the boring eyes of Kitchener, which burned into his very soul, causing him to shudder.

Then the Zeppelin raids—during them, he used to crouch in a corner of his boarding-house cellar, whimpering like a whipped puppy and culling upon the Lord to protect him.

Even his landlady despised him, although she had to admit that he was "good pay."

He very seldom read the papers, but one morning the landlady put the morning paper at his place before he came down to breakfast. Taking his seat he read the flaring headline, "Conscription Bill Passed," and nearly fainted. Excusing himself, he stumbled upstairs to his bedroom, with the horror of it gnawing into his vitals.

Having saved up a few pounds, he decided not to leave the house, and to sham sickness, so he stayed in his room and had the landlady serve his meals there.

Every time there was a knock at the door he trembled all over, imagining it was a policeman who had come to take him away to the army.

One morning his fears were realized. Sure enough, there stood a policeman with the fatal paper. Taking it in his trembling hand he read that he, Albert Lloyd, was ordered to report himself to the nearest recruiting station for physical examination. He reported immediately, because he was afraid to disobey.

The doctor looked with approval upon Lloyd's six feet of physical perfection, and thought what a fine sturdiness he would make, but examined his heart twice before he passed him as "physically fit," it was beating so fast.

From the recruiting depot Lloyd was taken, with many others, in charge of a sergeant, to the training depot at Aldershot, where he was given an outfit of khaki, and drew his other equipment. He made a face-looking soldier, except for the slight shrinking in his shoulders and the hunted look in his eyes.

At the training depot it does not take long to find out a man's character, and Lloyd was promptly dubbed "windy." In the English army "windy" means cowardly.

The smallest recruit in the barracks looked on him with contempt, and was not slow to show it in many ways.

Lloyd was a good soldier, learned quickly, obeyed every order promptly, never groused at the hardest fatigues. He was afraid to. He lived in deadly fear of the officers and "noncoms" over him. They also despised him.

One morning about three months after his enlistment Lloyd's company was paraded, and the names picked out for the next draft to France were read. When his name was called, he did not step out smartly, two paces to the front, and answer cheerfully, "Here, sir," as the others did. He just faltered in the ranks and was carried to barracks amid the sneers of the rest.

That night was an agony of misery to him. He could not sleep. Just cried and whimpered in his bunk, because on the morrow the draft was to sail for France, where he would see death on all sides, and perhaps be killed himself. On the steamer, crossing the channel, he would have jumped overboard to escape, but was afraid of drowning.

Arriving in France, he and the rest were huddled into cattle cars. On the side of each crouched in white terror.

"Hullo, 40, Chevre 8." After hours of bumping over the uneven French roadbeds they arrived at the training base of Rouen.

At this place they were put through a week's rigid training in trench warfare. On the morning of the eighth day they paraded at ten o'clock, and were inspected and passed by General H—, then were marched to the quarter-master's to draw their gas helmets and trench equipment.

At four in the afternoon they were again hustled into cattle cars. This time the journey lasted two days. They disembarked at the town of Frevent and could hear a distant dull booming. With knees shaking, Lloyd asked the sergeant what the noise was, and nearly dropped when the sergeant replied in a somewhat bored tone:

"Oh, them's the guns up the line. We'll be up there in a couple of days or so. Don't worry, my liddle, you'll see more of 'em than you want before you get 'ome to Bilitly again, that is, if you're lucky enough to get back. Now lead a hand there 'unloads' them cars, and quit that everlasting shakin'. I believe yer scared." The last with a contemptuous sneer.

They marched ten kilos, full pack, to a little dilapidated village, and the sound of the guns grew louder, constantly louder.

The village was full of soldiers who turned out to inspect the new draft, the men who were shortly to be their mates in the trenches, for they were going "up the line" on the morrow, to "take over" their certain sector of trenches.

The draft was paraded in front of battalion headquarters and the men were assigned to companies.

Lloyd was the only man assigned to D company. Perhaps the officer in charge of the draft had something to do with it, for he called Lloyd aside and said:

"Lloyd, you are going to a new company. No one knows you. Your bed will be as you make it, so for God's sake, brace up and be a man. I think you have the stuff in you, my boy, so good-by and the best of luck to you."

The next day the battalion took over their part of the trenches. It happened to be a very quiet day. The artillery behind the lines was still, except for an occasional shell sent over to let the Germans know the gunners were not asleep.

In the darkness, in single file, the company slowly wended their way down the communication trench to the front line. No one noticed Lloyd's white and drawn face.

After they had relieved the company in the trenches, Lloyd, with two of the old company men, was put on guard in one of the traverses. Not a shot was fired from the German lines, and no one paid any attention to him crouched on the firing step.

On the first time in, a new recruit is not required to stand with his head "over the top." He only "wats it out," while the older men keep watch.

At about ten o'clock, all of a sudden, he thought hell had broken loose, and crouched and shivered up against the parapet. Shells started bursting, as he imagined, right in their trench, when in fact they were landing about a hundred yards in rear of them, in the second line.

One of the older men on guard, turning to his mate, said:

"There goes Fritz with those d—d trench mortars again. It's about time our artillery 'taped' them, and sent over a few. Well, I'll be d—d, where's that blighter of a draft man gone to? There's his rifle leaning against the parapet. He must have legged it. Just keep your eye peeled, Dick, while I report it to the sergeant. I wonder if the fool knows he can be shot for such tricks as leavin' his post?"

Lloyd had gone. When the trench mortars opened up, a maddening terror seized him and he wanted to run, to get away from that horrible din, anywhere to safety. So quietly sneaking around the traverse, he came to the entrance of a communication trench, and ran madly and blindly down it, running into traverses, stumbling into muddy holes, and falling full length over trench grids.

Groping blindly, with his arms stretched out in front of him, he at last came out of the trench into the village, or what used to be a village, before the German artillery razed it. Mixed with his fear, he had a peculiar sort of cunning, which whispered to him to avoid all sentries, because if they saw him he would be sent back to that awful destruction in the front line, and perhaps be killed or maimed. The thought made him shudder, the cold sweat coming out in beads on his face.

On his left, in the darkness, he could make out the shadowy forms of trees; crawling on his hands and knees, stopping and crouching with fear at each shell-burst, he finally reached an old orchard and covered at the base of a shot-scarred apple tree.

He remained there all night, listening to the sound of the guns and ever praying, praying that his useless life would be spared.

As dawn began to break, he could discern little dark objects protruding from the ground all about him. Curiosity mastered his fear and he crawled to one of the objects, and there, in the uncertain light, he read on a little wooden cross:

"Pte. H. S. Wheaton, No. 1670, 1st London Regt. R. F. Killed in action, April 25, 1916. R. I. P." (Rest in Peace.)

When it dawned on him that he had been hiding all night in a cemetery his reason seemed to leave him, and a mad desire to be free from it all made him rush madly away, falling over little wooden crosses, smashing some and trampling others under his feet.

In his flight he came to an old French dugout, half caved in and partially filled with slush and filthy water.

Like a fox being chased by the hounds, he ducked into this hole, and threw himself on a pile of old empty sandbags, wet and moldered. Then—unconsciousness.

On the next day, he came to; far distant voices sounded in his ears. Opening his eyes, in the entrance of the dugout he saw a corporal and two men with fixed bayonets.

The corporal was addressing him: "Get up, you white-livered blighter! Curse you and the day you ever joined D company, spilling their fine record! It'll be you up against the wall, and a good job too. Get hold of him, men, and if he makes a break, give him the bayonet, and send it home, the cowardly sneak. Come on, you, move, we've been looking for you long enough."

Lloyd, trembling and weakened by his long fast, tottered out, assisted by a soldier on each side of him. They took him before the captain, but could get nothing out of him but:

"For God's sake, sir, don't have me shot, don't have me shot!"

The captain, utterly disgusted with him, sent him under escort to division headquarters for trial by court-martial, charged with desertion under fire. They shot deserters in France.

During his trial, Lloyd sat as one dazed, and could put nothing forward in his defense, only an occasional "Don't have me shot!"

His sentence was passed: "To be shot at 3:35 o'clock in the morning of May 18, 1916." This meant that he had only one more day to live.

He did not realize the awfulness of his sentence; his brain seemed paralyzed. He knew nothing of his trip, under guard, in a motor lorry to the sandbagged guardroom in the village, where he was dumped on the floor and left, while a sentry with a fixed bayonet paced up and down in front of the entrance.

Bully beef, water and biscuits were left beside him for his supper.

The sentry, seeing that he ate nothing, came inside and shook him by the shoulder, saying in a kind voice:

"Cheera, liddle, better eat something. You'll feel better. Don't give up hope. You'll be pardoned before morning. I know the way they run these things. They're only trying to scare you, that's all. Come now, that's a good lad, eat something. It'll make the world look different to you."

The good-hearted sentry knew he was lying about the pardon. He knew nothing short of a miracle could save the poor lad.

Lloyd listened eagerly to his sentry's words, and believed them. A look of hope came into his eyes, and he ravenously ate the meal beside him.

In about an hour's time, the chaplain came to see him, but Lloyd would have none of him. He wanted no pardon; he was to be pardoned.

The artillery behind the lines suddenly opened up with everything they had. An intense bombardment of the enemy's lines had commenced. The roar of the guns was deafening. Lloyd's fears came back with a rush, and he cowered on the earthen floor with his hands over his face.

The sentry, seeing his position, came in and tried to cheer him by talking to him:

"Never mind them guns, boy, they won't hurt you. They are ours. We are giving the Boches a dose of their own medicine. Our boys are going over the top at dawn of the morning to take their trenches. We'll give 'em a taste of cold steel with their sausages and beer. You just sit tight now until they relieve you. I'll have to go now, lad, as it's nearly time for my relief, and I don't want them to see me a-talkin' with you. So long, liddle, cheera."

With this, the sentry resumed the pacing of his post. In about ten minutes' time he was relieved, and a D company man took his place.

Looking into the guardhouse, the sentry noticed the cowering attitude of Lloyd, and, with a sneer, said to him:



He Betrayed His Country.

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(Continued.)

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